

[History of career (import) of J. H. Kimbrough]

[????]

Accession no.

W 3609

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WPA L.C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Form[md;]3

Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Handbooks, [Begin] : Last night's

Library of Congress

last race....

Place of origin Chicago, Illinois Date 6/1/39

Project worker Abe Aaron

Project editor

Remarks

Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FOLKLORE

[md;]

CHICAGO

FORM A

Circumstances of Interview

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Abe Aaron

ADDRESS 5471 Ellis Ave., Chicago, Illinois

DATE June 1, 1939

SUBJECT American Lives Handbooks

1. Date and time of Interview May 20th-21st ff.

Library of Congress

2. Place of interview 47th & Cottage Grove

3. Name and address of informant Many - names and addresses may not be given - material available only on this condition.

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. Philip Marcus, 4523 S. Cottage Grove Ave.,

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Handbook

(Use as many additional sheets as necessary, for any of the forms, each bearing the proper heading and the number to which the material refers.)

W3609

FORM C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

FOLKLORE

[md;]

CHICAGO

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Abe Aaron

ADDRESS 5471 Ellis Ave., Chicago

DATE June 1, 1939

SUBJECT Handbooks

NAME OF INFORMANT Philip Marcus, et al

I

Last night's last race, there was an eight-horse race up, and some screwy dame, she had six tickets, on six different horses, all on the nose; and not one of them was hers. The winner only paid four to one, so she'd o' lost money anyway, even if she'd o' had the winner. That was over in Happy's joint.

II

You know what house odds are. The house handicaps the horses the same way the track handicapper does an' offers odds on 'em, an' if you place your bet before the race comes up an' the mutuels at the track start changin' the odds too fast, you can take house prices if ya want when ya bet, up to a minute or two before the race comes up. The house usually pays more in the track odds, b'cause take it as a rule, the prices always go down in the mutuels, especially if the horse is a favorite, if it's a good pony an' it aint no dog. Ya can't get house in Chicago no more; the books pay off on the mutuels.

When the books had house prices, I remember one time, there was a guy who'd been bettin' deuces, fives an' tens all afternoon, an' knockin' 'em off. An' he was pickin' 'is own horses. There was a hot horse in the seventh race up at Arlington, an' the buy picked it an' wanted to bet five on it; but the book wouldn't give 'im house on it, because the guy'd been pickin' 'em all day an' the book thought it was a system horse an' the system was clickin' that day. It was a hot horse, but the guy had picked it accidentally; but 'e couldn't get house.

III

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Red was fixin' up one of 'is joints one time, decoratin' it all over. There was a painter who worked there almost all winter. This painter, 'e'd be up on 'is ladder workin' away, an' as 'e worked, 'e'd be keepin' 'is eyes on the sheets an' watchin' the ponies. They'd yell, "They're off," an' this painter, "he'd yell out, "Give me two on so and so," an' when 'e was done with the job, 'e owed money to the book.

IV

You know what skeleton service is. Sometimes, if it's a small book, or if it's a track the book don't care too much about, they get only skeleton service; they don't get no description on the race; they just call the race an' tell you when it's over an' who won. If you don't close bettin' when the service tells you, wire tappers get in. The service protects you if you close your bettin' on time.

You know Carl, the wall man at Red's. Well, he's bettin' one o' these tracks that Red's gettin' skeleton service on. But he has too much to do, writin' up the sheets an' all, to keep watch when the race comes up for it to got off an' to get his bets in on time, an' he likes to play that track. The service says the race is comin' off, an' then it don't say nothin' more till the race is over an' it tells you who won an' how much it paid. Carl, he has all the races at all the tracks to take care of, so for this track he keeps an alarm clock to tell when the race comes up so's he can get his bets on time. Havin' so much to do, he sets the alarm so's he can get two bucks on the horse.

I was in there one day when the alarm goes off. Carl, he's workin' on a sheet, changin' the prices that're comin' over the wire, when the alarm goes off. He rushes over to sut off the alarm an' goes over to make his bet. Just then the alarm goes off again, an' he has to rush back to shut it off again, —he didn't shut it off all the way the first timeOOan' when he rushes back to the counter to make the bet, just as he get there the service yells. "They're off," and it's too late to make a bet. An' his horse wins.

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V

When D. was just five years old, Slim S. was shop boy at Ray's then (a sign shop), me an' the wife 'd had a spat—you know me, old Dr. X.—an I'd left her for a while. I was livin' up above the shop—I was workin' for Ray then—an' Slimmy boy, he'd go down to see the wife an' he'd bring D. back with him to see me. Later in the day, or maybe the next day he'd take the little fellow back to the wife.

One day Slim come from the wife' an' he had D. with him. He couldn't find me in my room or in the shop, so he comes over to the book, an' there I am. I had D. with me all afternoon. He'd sit beside me, never peepin', an' every once in a while when they'd yell, "They're off," if there was somethin' I liked in the race, I'd rush up to lay a half buck on it. The little guy, he wasn't sayin' nothin', just sittin' there watchin', takin' it all in, unknown to me. It was like that for several races. Then they, yell, "They're off," again, an' I run up there, an' the little guy, he tugs at my coat an' says, "Daddy, haven't you given them enough money already[/??]" He noticed they wasn't givin' me any.

VI

Every once in awhile you'll hear the story about the horse player who was found dead in the street. He's got a ticket for a parlay in his pocket an' the parlay won. I guess maybe it might happen sometime, that or somethin' like it; why not?

VII

We was at the book one day—you know, for our daily whippin'—, me an' Charley, an' Charley, he says to me, "Jesus, why don't we get together with Abe an' write a book showin' why you can't beat the races; you could make plenty on somethin' like that; I bet it would go over big. Me, I pipe up, "Yeh. An' with all our money, why, we'd have enough to start playin' our system."

VIII

Why, Goddamnit, Abe, a guy come to the book for six months with a tear in his pants so big he had it patched with two diaper pins. He played two bucks or so every day.

An' Carl, the sheet-writer, why, last winter he had a hole in his overcoat. He always had the scratch sheet in his hip pocket, and that scratch sheet stuck through that hole in his overcoat every time you saw him. Maybe he didn't repair it because it was easier to get at his pants pocket with that hole there, but I maintain he just couldn't take time off from thinkin' about the ponies. Anyway, it was funnier 'n hell seein' that every day. IXI IX

A., the mechanic, he runs the auto repair joint across the street from the book. Every day he rushes in the front door of the book an' out the back, makin' maybe a dozen bets a day. As if no one knows what 'e's doin'. Stick around, you'll see 'im any minute now.

Down at Happy's place, right across the street from it, there's a gas station. The owner runs it himself, an' he's got two attendants with him there all the time. Happy was tellin' me about it the other day; he's been playin' at Happy's about a year now.

This guy, he makes so many bets, he keeps the attendants runnin' back an' forth across the street all day long. He makes so many bets, they're passin' each other up, one goin' to the book, the other comin' back, an' the only thing he's worried about is they don't got hit by a street car crossin' the street. Happy says, "One is comin' in the door an' the other's goin' out."

Happy sends him four scratch sheets over every morning. He don't play no system. If he likes the name of a horse, he bets him; he don't bet information horses. An' Happy says to me, "An' he still owns the gas station."

XI

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I was working' in this saloon. The success of this saloon lay in the fact that as I was workin' there a familiar voice comes out, the e-o-leven voice; it was a book, with full racin' service. (The broad-master working for the racing service pronounces "eleven" in the manner indicated, with long e and long o, adding a syllable to the word.—) There's a woman in this saloon—or book, which is right behind it—, an' I hear her talkin'. I look in there, an' that dame, she didn't have no class at all. I hear her talkin', about her an' her girl chums. They're all together, philosophizin' like a bunch o' women would, an' she says, "Let's do somethin' to keep from gamblin'." So they make a date to go

FORM C

out golfin' the next day. Just as they was about to break up, one of 'em said, "Let's make it real early." They jibber jabber around for a while, an' then this second dame, she says, "Oh, come on, let's make it early, b'cause I want to get back in time for the first race."

XII

There was an old woman in the book one day. It was just after the description of a race an' she was standin' there, all flustered. I walks up to her, an' I asks very confidentially, "Do you like the ponies?"

She says, "Yes." She's just as confidential as I am. She says, "I'm too old, you know, to have any other vices." She knocked me of my pins with that one.

XIII

That reminds me of an old woman. She's in the book every day. She's white-haired, an' she's about sixty, an' while she's watchin' the races she keeps rollin' Bull Durham cigarettes. She handicaps her own horses. When the description starts comin' in over the wire, the horse that's out in front, she always says to everyone in general, "That's my number one horse." Then there's another horse out in front, an' she says, "That's my

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number two horse.” Comin' into the stretch, maybe there's still a third horse out in front, an' she says, “That's my number three horses.” If one o' them three win, she's a swell handicapper, only she never puts money on nothin' over them three horses, bootin' them in, an' then they announce the winner; he aint even got a call while the race was bein' run like as not. When that happens she goes back in a corner an's quiet as a mouse, till the next race comes up.

XIV

You hear all kinds o' stories about systems for beatin' the races. Some o' the systems are mathematical, an' some o' them are handicappin' one way or another, an' some o' them depend on numerology or astrology or followin' certain jockeys or certain ponies or certain tracks; none o' them are any good. I got the only sure-fire system to beat the ponies. It goes like this—only you gotta go to the track to play it.

Well, you go out to the track an' you got as close as you can get to the rail when the race is bein' run. You've got you a pair of high-powered binoculars, an' you train 'em on the ponies. The glasses are so powerful it brings the ponies right up to your eyes. So you train the glass on the pony that's carryin' your dough, bring him right up close to your eyes- an' you whip 'im in !

XV

C. runs around mouthin' more excuses whenever he's not on a winner than anyone I know of. He follows the scratch sheet; the scratch sheet's his bible. He's got what he calls a rock-bound system for the ponies, based on the scratch sheet. He has an idea if you play the first five horses on the sheet in a race you're bound to win in the end. We know it can't be done, but that's neither here nor there. Here're some of his excuses. He'll say:

“I didn't know he was in the races. If I'd known he was in the race.....

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"You know, that horse was fourth in the scratch sheet.

"You know, that horse was the among the first five on the scratch sheet.

"See the weight on that horse? The best horse carries the most weight.

"You see the boy on him? He's the best boy in the country.

"Ya know, I sent whosis over to the barber to get a buck so's I could bet, an' the barber didn't have it."

XVI

I remember one night. There was Al, Everett, Charley, Slim, Arnold and me. We was all in Charley's room. Oh yes, there was Larry, too, Larry the physical culture enthusiast; Larry was my helper then. We was tryin' to figure the next day's races.

Slim an' me, we were checkin' over some systems. Charley was layin' down in the bed; he was tired. Al was on the floor, on his elbow, an' he had the winner finder—you know, the magnifying glass, an' he had papers on the floor all spread out around him; he had the Racing Record, the Form, the Scratch Sheet, the Daily News and the Times turf selections; the whole floor was covered up with all those papers. Ray an' Arnold, they was sittin' over in the corner, figurin'. An' Larry, Larry was standing at the bed, doing calisthenics.

Pretty soon Ray gets up to go out of the room, an' I say to him, "Be careful where you walk, Ray, you might step on an entry."

Then everythin' was quiet again; we were as studious as if it was the Library of Congress, or somethin'.